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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept and definitions of adult education, the assumptions made about adults and their educational abilities and motives, the aims and objects of adult education, and the means and methods in adult education. The paper concludes that there is a close relationship between the aims and methods of adult education and the view of humans as independent in their search for solutions to problems. Adult education is assumed to attract mature people intent on personal, intellectual, and professional development in the direction of autonomy. The study content, the institutional forms, and the methods usually applied are intended to pave the way for this development. The maturity of participants in adult education would seem to strengthen the assumptions that adult students are--or can be--particularly capable of independent study. This maturity, the conversational methods developed, and the very ethos of adult education make it reasonable to expect of adult study particular potentials for developing independent personalities. This expectation and knowledge of the general motivation of voluntary, mature learners make lifelong learning a realistic proposition for considerable numbers of people to whom study opportunities are continuously available. A 66-item reference list concludes the document. (KC)

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FernUniversität
Gesamthochschule

ZIFF PAPIERE 49

ADULT EDUCATION: STUDENTS' INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY AS FOUNDATIONS AND AS EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

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BÖRJE HOLMBERG

	From		Toward
1.	Dependence	----------→	Autonomy
2.	Passivity	----------→	Activity
3.	Subjectivity	----------→	Objectivity
4.	Ignorance	----------→	Enlightenment
5.	Small abilities	----------→	Large abilities
6.	Few responsibilities	----------→	Many responsibilities
7.	Narrow interets	----------→	Broad interests
8.	Selfishness	----------→	Altruism
9.	Self-rejection	----------→	Self-acceptance
10.	Amorphous self-identity	----------→	Integrated self-identity
11.	Focus on particulars	----------→	Focus on principles
12.	Superficial concerns	----------→	Deep concerns
13.	Imitation	----------→	Originality
14.	Need for certainty	----------→	Tolerance for ambiguity
15.	Impulsiveness	----------→	Rationality

(Knowles 1970 p. 25)

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Hagen, Januar 1984

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Z u s a m m e n f a s s u n g

Der vorliegende Text ist eine Untersuchung der verbreiteten Vorstellungen, daß einerseits Erwachsenenstudium prinzipiell auf der Selbstständigkeit der Lernenden beruht, andererseits daß Selbständigkeit aus Erwachsenenstudium hervorgehen kann.

Nach einer Analyse des Begriffs Erwachsenenbildung (adult education) werden unterschiedliche Darlegungen dieser Vorstellungen gezeigt (Morgan, Holmes & Bundy; Husén; Knowles; McDonald & Knights; Essert; Beder & Darkenwald usw.), die in folgende Hypothesen münden:

1. Da Alter an sich kein Hindernis für Lernen und Studium darstellt, ist der Begriff lebenslanges Lernen eine realistische Vorstellung.
2. In der Regel sind erwachsene Lerner stark intrinsisch motiviert und um des gewählten Studiums willen zu Selbstdisziplin bereit.
3. Von motivierten erwachsenen Lernern wird infolge ihrer Erfahrungen und ihrer Sozialisation im allgemeinen angenommen, daß sie in größerem Maße als Schüler oder sogar Studenten fähig sind, selbständig nach Fakten und Argumenten zu suchen, und somit auch besser für ein autonomes Studium geeignet sind.
4. Erwachsenenbildung kann zur Entwicklung unabhängiger Persönlichkeiten und zur Vorbereitung auf ein autonomes Studium beitragen.

Anschließend werden die Ziele und Lerninhalte der Erwachsenenbildung mit folgendem Ergebnis untersucht: Jedes Lernziel und jedes Fach ist mit Erwachsenenstudium zu vereinbaren. Die Lernziele und Lerninhalte, die selbständiges Lernen und Denken fördern sollen, spielen eine besondere Rolle in den Ideologien - und wahrscheinlich auch Praktiken - etlicher Organisationen, die in der Erwachsenenbildung aktiv sind.

Ferner werden die in der Erwachsenenbildung angewandten Methoden erörtert, wobei das Gespräch - real und simuliert - besonders hervorgehoben wird.

Den Schluß bildet die Feststellung, daß die an die Erwachsenenbildung gestellten Ansprüche, - nämlich daß sie einerseits von der Selbständigkeit der Lernenden ihren besonderen Charakter erhalten und andererseits diese Selbständigkeit fördern soll - bedingt zu recht bestehen. Es wird behauptet, daß Erwachsenenbildung in ihren Werten und Zielen mehr oder weniger allgemein mit den Idealen der Unabhängigkeit und Autonomie verbunden wird. Von dieser Haltung der Unabhängigkeit und Autonomie wird die Erwachsenenbildungstätigkeit weithin getragen, obgleich es offensichtliche Ausnahmen gibt.

In its report of 1972 to the Director-General of Unesco the International Commission on the Development of Education lays down a number of principles relevant to adult education, among them the following two:

> We propose lifelong learning as the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries (Faure et al. 1972 p. 182).
>
> The new educational ethos makes the individual the master and creator of his own cultural progress. Self-learning, especially assisted self-learning, has irreplaceable value in any educational system (Faure et al. 1972 p. 269).

These two principles may be taken as examples of how maturity and autonomy are considered to be related to adult education.

1 THE CONCEPT OF ADULT EDUCATION

Only rarely does adult education denote just *any* kind of adult study. University study by full-time students over 18 or 20 is, for instance, usually excluded (cf. Brunner 1959 p. 1). Adult education is today usually taken to mean education of grown-up people (over 18 or so) who, after they have had some education, are or have been active in an occupation (cf. Flinck 1977, Fredriksson & Gestrelius 1975, Liveright & Ohliger 1970 p. 47). If this definition is accepted, then both for instance a farm labourer taking a course in arithmetic and a physician taking a further-training course in X-ray or isotope diagnostics are participants in adult education. At the same time lectures, study-group activities and individual study concerned with existential problems, social situations, aesthetic enjoyment, philosophy etc. are included in the concept of adult education.

On many points, however, the needs of and the methods applicable to any adult students inclusive of ordinary university students at under- and postgraduate level agree with those of adult students in the sense of the definition. The definition of adult education seems to be a minor concern as long as in each discussion explicit mention is made of what is meant.

According to Ziegler 1966 p. 130

> one cannot speak of "adult education" as one can speak of the public elementary and high school programs, and expect a common understanding of what is meant by the term. For in addition to the range of activities which comprise adult education, this branch of education has been and continues to be conducted by a multitude of contrasting institutions and agencies each providing according to its own plan (or) method.

Considerable differences between individual students, their interests, backgrounds and other frame factors have been established in adult-education activities (Eliasson & Höglund 1971, Flinck 1977, Gould et al. 1973, Harry et al 1981, Wedemeyer 1981 etc.). Extreme heterogeneity would seem to prevent any uniform characterisation of adult students, their needs and wishes, the subjects studied and even to some extent the methods applied. This is evident from any observation of adult education work whether in residential courses, e.g. the Scandinavian folk high schools, British WEA summer schools or professional further training, or in evening classes run by schools, authorities or voluntary organisations, in distance education, in on-the-job training, in self-learning with or without the support of counsellors or tutors. The subject areas vary between on the one hand those concerned with education purely for its own sake which can, but need not, apply to such subjects as literature, philosophy, music, Latin and advanced mathematics, and - on the other hand - entirely job-oriented learning. Between these extremes there are subjects useful in everyday life relevant

both to general education and some kinds of training, for instance modern foreign languages, economics, civics and science. Also the academic level varies considerably in different types of adult education, between degree standard and above, and - as the most extreme contrast - no or little developed literacy.

However, there are decisive common denominators. One seems to be a certain amount of maturity on the part of adult students. Normally they also have one thing in common in their general life circumstances: unless retired, ill or disabled they are gainfully employed, entrepreneurs, active as 'home-makers' or looking for a job. Further, their study is undertaken voluntarily, although under certain circumstances some may feel a moral compulsion to take part. In West Germany, where the term adult education (*Erwachsenenbildung*) is gradually being replaced by further education (*Weiterbildung*) this concept has been convincingly analysed by Schmitz 1980 against the relevant social and educational developments and succinctly defined as 'any educational process by means of which an earlier educational activity is continued'.[1]

Adult students are often said to be independent and autonomous. These two adjectives and the nouns they are based on are sometimes used synonymously. In the present context autonomy implies that students make their own decisions, and independence means that morally and intellectually students are not dependent on authorities. On different kinds of independence cf. Moore 1977 and Holmberg 1981 p. 17.

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1 "Weiterbildung ist jeder Bildungsprozeß, mit dem eine frühere Bildungsbemühung fortgesetzt wird" (Schmitz 1980 p. 23).

2 ASSUMPTIONS

Many adult students have proved remarkably successful in their learning, well-informed and balanced in their judgements. This and/or great appreciation of the advantages inherent in the experiences of adults have caused some educators to infer that adult students are, on the whole, more capable of surveying contexts, more independent in their search for information and solutions of problems as well as better prepared for autonomous work and decisions than students in traditional formal education (cf. Wedemeyer 1981 p. 165 , Husén 1966 p. 23 ff and Morgan, Holmes & Bundy 1976; the latter state that adult education 'takes advantage of the older person's superior ability to solve problems which require reason and judgement. Adult education ties in with the experiences of adults ...'/p. 19/).

These assumptions have theoretical backing in cognitive psychology. The genetic mental base of a human being is developed by the experiences and (intellectual) findings he or she makes. Each individual's cognitive structures are continuously widened and modified, and all learning starts out from and gradually modifies existing cognitive structures (cf. Ausubel 1968, Neisser 1967). It is against this background that Ausubel as his motto states, 'If I had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, I would say this: The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly' (Ausubel 1968 before the Preface). The same author states that it is

> ... a commonplace that the details of a given discipline are learned as rapidly as they can be fitted into a contextual framework consisting of a stable and appropriate body of general concepts and principles. When we deliberately attempt to influence cognitive structure so as to maximise meaningful learning and retention, we come to the heart of the educative process (Ausubel 1977 p. 93).

Evidently all adults have learnt from their experiences. They have practised their judgement, when dealing with

everyday problems, when reading and discussing issues of interest to them. The cognitive structures of active adults motivated for study are therefore, on the whole, assumed to be more developed than those of students who have just left school. Adults are also assumed to have a problem-centred orientation to learning (Knowles 1970 p. 58), the basis of which seems to be the kind of socialisation typical of an adult motivated for study.

Assumptions of this kind are implicitly evident from the appreciation of study-circles of the Scandinavian type as working groups of equals where the subject specialist - if there is one - is not considered superior to the other participants but essentially a resource person. Most probably similar thinking is the background of some of the open-entry schemes of universities. Undoubtedly the British Open University favours applicants who are adult students in the sense of the definition above and by statute does so irrespectively of their previous schooling. A Swedish applicant for university study can fulfil the entry requirements *either* through school learning of approximately British sixth-form standard (German Abitur, French baccalauréat) *or* through meeting age and work requirements (25 years of age and at least four years of gainful occupation) (Kim 1982).

This may be interpreted as an attempt to operationalise the maturity concept. Some of the fifteen 'dimensions of maturation' discussed by Knowles would seem to have been involved in the thinking behind the policies referred to:

From		Toward
1. Dependence	---------->	Autonomy
2. Passivity	---------->	Activity
3. Subjectivity	---------->	Objectivity
4. Ignorance	---------->	Enlightenment
5. Small abilities	---------->	Large abilities
6. Few responsibilities	---------->	Many responsibilities
7. Narrow interests	---------->	Broad interests
8. Selfishness	---------->	Altruism
9. Self-rejection	---------->	Self-acceptance
10. Amorphous self-identity	---------->	Integrated self-identity
11. Focus on particulars	---------->	Focus on principles
12. Superficial concerns	---------->	Deep concerns
13. Imitation	---------->	Originality
14. Need for certainty	---------->	Tolerance for ambiguity
15. Impulsiveness	---------->	Rationality

(Knowles 1970 p. 25)

However that may be, the type of maturity that is acquired through age and non-academic work is - in cases like those mentioned - by itself accepted as a relevant qualification for academic study. All this reflects the awareness that 'adult non-traditional learners are in situations and have role behaviors, characterized by independence, responsibility, and autonomy that contrast sharply with the situations and role behaviours of children and youth' (Wedemeyer 1981 p. 165). Mature students have, according to McDonald & Knights 1979, proved to 'have a capacity for taking a large amount of responsibility for their own learning'. The same authors stress that initial anxiety and lack of confidence on the part of adult learners with so far undeveloped study skills may lead to 'the underlying competence of mature students' being underestimated (as quoted in Isaacs 1981 p. 11).

This leads up to a generally high appreciation of adult students' level in intellectual work. Another factor assumed to vouch for the high standard of adult education is the fact that most adults who study something do so voluntarily and presumably because they themselves want to do it. There would thus seem to be reason to refer to strong intrinsic motivation in favour of adult education.

The major part of (American) adult education is, according to Essert 1951, 'engaged in helping people meet their individual needs as they are interpreted by individuals themselves' (p. 8). However, in some cases both peer-group pressure and the implicit or explicit wishes of employers are influences to be counted with, the latter in personnel training, the former for example in the so-called outreaching offer of adult educational facilities which, in Sweden, particularly workers with little schooling have been treated (or subjected) to by being looked up at their places of work or in their housing areas.

These invitations to study emanate from the trade unions, which may contribute to rousing a sense of moral study duty (FÖVUX 1974). Nevertheless there can be little doubt that by far most adult education takes place at the premeditated and express wish of students whose study is thus entirely voluntary.

The results of a comparative study by Beder & Darkenwald suggest that adults are perceived as more motivated, pragmatic, self-directed, and task-oriented than pre-adults (Beder & Darkenwald 1982 p. 142), which undoubtedly agrees with assumptions generally made by adult educators.

The question what age means for intelligence and learning capacity has been looked into by several scholars. On the whole research findings support those who claim that age by itself rarely exerts an exclusively negative influence on learning. It is thus generally assumed that life-long learning is a realistic possibility (cf. Bääth 1977, Belbin 1965, Löwe 1974 and Giles & Allman 1982).

A further assumption is that adult education, i.e. the education of the mature and experienced, has special potentials for the development of critical and independent personalities and for training in autonomous study and thinking (Husén et al. 1966 p. 23f). There is much evidence of adult students having become leading administrators, scholars and politicians who have declared themselves indebted to what adult education has given them in terms not only of knowledge and skills but also of confidence, study technique and independence (cf. Gaddén 1973).

Adult education of the type that is completely independent of prescribed curricula is in the minds of many educators and also in an official (Swedish) document identified with asking and querying (Folkbildning för 80 talet 1979 p. 97). However, there are those who contradict statements

of this kind. Thus, for instance, Keddie claims that 'adult education is more like the rest of the education system than unlike it, both its curriculum and its pedagogy' and treats 'the claim to distinctiveness as an ideological claim' (Keddie 1980 p. 45). In this context the heterogeneity of adult education must be taken into account. It is no doubt necessary to distinguish between on one hand adult learning concerned with thinking and problem solving, on the other hand mere memorising as it occurs in some kinds of training for jobs.

It would nevertheless seem to be in order to state the following preliminary hypotheses as reflecting some fairly general implicit assumptions about adult education:

1 Life-long learning is a realistic proposition as age eo ipso is no obstacle to serious study.

2 Adult students are, on the whole, strongly intrinsically motivated and ready to discipline themselves for the study they have chosen.

3 Motivated adult students are, as a result of their experience and socialisation, generally taken to be more capable of independent searching for facts and arguments than traditional learners in school (or even university) and thus better prepared for autonomous study.

4 Adult education can be effective in developing independent personalities and in training people for autonomous study.

A study of the aims and objects of adult education, its means and methods, would seem to be called for against this background. It should be made clear from the beginning that the hypotheses listed cannot possibly be of a nomological character, i.e. they cannot be claimed to apply always and under all circumstances. They can at best prove true in the sense that they verbalise general tendencies and what applies in a great many or most cases.

3 THE AIMS AND OBJECTS OF ADULT EDUCATION

Various aims have been declared to be particularly suitable for or typical of adult education, such as, on the one hand, intellectual development and enjoyment, understanding of scientific and other scholarly thinking, encouragement of search for truth, and, on the other hand, entirely utilitarian purposes, such as upgrading school or occupational education.

Bergevin 1967, as quoted by White 1970, particularly refers to the following goals of adult education

- to help the learner achieve a degree of happiness and meaning in life
- to help the learner understand himself, his talents, his limitations, and his relationship with other persons,
- to help adults recognize and understand the need for lifelong learning
- to provide conditions and opportunities to help the adult advance in the maturation process spiritually, culturally, physically, politically, and vocationally
- to provide, where needed, education for survival in literacy, vocational skills, and health measures.

(White 1970 p. 132)

In some discussions the needs of the individuals are contrasted with those of society as made explicit by the following question asked by Roby Kidd: 'Is adult learning concerned primarily with the clarification of ideas and intellectual processes or preparing the learner for action in community or society?' (Kidd 1973 p. 27). To most adult educators the answer is undoubtedly 'both' or, in individual cases, 'either ... or'.

Adult education - like education in general - has also been regarded as a means to change social conditions and improve society generally; to pave the way for and serve the purposes of equality has, for example, in some societies

been declared to be the chief aim of education (thus by the Swedish politician Olof Palme / Erasmie 1976 p. 136/). This shows in my opinion conclusively what should be - but unfortunately is not - generally recognised: goals of educational institutions are the objects not only of scholarly but also of political discussion, and institutional goal decisions are political decisions (which does not prevent educational scholarship either to develop procedures and trace facts on which these political decisions can be based or to make them operational / Holmberg 1982 /). There can be no scholarly truth about what improving society means. Values based on religious or political beliefs are decisive here.

It does not make sense to try to prescribe certain subject areas as those of adult education. Any school subject, any occupational learning matter and any academic discipline can be catered for within the activities of adult education. A study of, for instance, American and French personnel training, British university extension, German 'Volkshochschule', Swedish adult education as organised by local authorities and voluntary organisations, literacy work and other basic education in developing countries (cf. Prosser 1967) makes this clear.

What types of study, subjects and levels are offered is in the Western world largely dependent on the demands of the adults who can make use of the offer. There is a market for adult education which is strongly influenced by the information activities of the bodies providing study facilities, e.g. local authority organisations, correspondence schools, voluntary study associations. Against this background it is only to be expected that - as is actually the case in many countries - adult education should offer, on the one hand, study opportunities following the curricula of various types of formal education, and, on the other hand, courses both in utilitarian subjects outside normal school or training

curricula and courses that serve no practical purpose but meet demands for personal development, general orientation and intellectual problem solving. Individual educational bodies offer the programmes and curricula they have developed and in many instances compete with other bodies representing different - or even identical - approaches. Already selecting the right course for his/her needs or wishes is an exercise in independent judgement on the part of the adult student and is usually an autonomous act. Formal curricula specially developed for adult education occur in exceptional cases, e.g. the German scholarly further training of university graduates ('wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung').

There are also study facilities in subject areas which are only very generally delineated and in which nothing like a curriculum is decided on in advance. Lifelong learning without the support of particular institutions is, for instance, an essential element in Jewish culture (Graff 1980 pp. 111 - 121).

Jewish learning traditions evidently strongly favour student autonomy, but it would probably be misleading to make a special issue of this in the present context. Learning for its own sake is seen as an ideal aim of Jewish socialisation (Güdemann 1884, Carlebach 1926 as quoted in Graff 1980), but this is typical of the learning of all ages and nothing stressed particularly in adult education. Lifelong learning seems to have been a reality among Jews since Biblical times (Goldman 1975). It is apparently inappropriate in Judaism to distinguish between youth education and adult education (Katz & Lamm 1975 p. 359; cf. Graff 1980 p. 112). Evident differences of approach to student autonomy in distance education between the Israeli Everyman's University and, for instance, the British Open University or the West German FernUniversität seem to find part of their explanation in this Jewish background (Graff 1980 p. 196).

Attempts have been made in general terms to describe the needs on which adults build their own curricula, i.e. choose their courses themselves. A notable one is Wedemeyer's:

> Non-traditional learners who choose their courses are likely to select on the basis of their concerns. Institutional curriculum makers are likely to build curricula on the basis of subject matter, tasks to be accomplished, or situations to be faced. The learner, however, tends to be responsive to his concerns, which are the product of tasks, situations, and aspirations, signals from within and without that intrinsically motivate him to do something - learn, for example - in progressively coping with present or future situations.
> .....
>
> What sorts of concerns do human beings have? What can the teacher , parent, or learner think of according to what each knows about himself and others as learners? Would these be "universal" concerns?
>
> 1. concern with self
> 2. concern with social adequacy
> 3. concern with being important to another or others
> 4. concern with understanding the physical world
> 5. concern with understanding the mental, emotional, spiritual world
> 6. concern with earning a living, with survival
> 7. concern with reaching one's potential
> 8. concern with being secure
> 9. concern for others - in the family, the immediate circle of friends, among peers and colleagues, in the community, and as a part of society
> 10. concern for values to guide one's life towards the greatest possible fulfilment, happiness and contribution to life
>
> (Wedemeyer 1981 pp. 186 - 187).

In short: Any study goal and any learning area is compatible with adult education. The goals and learning areas which are assumed to promote independent learning and thinking play a special part in the ideologies - and presumably practices - of some bodies active in adult education. What can the adult educator do to promote these ideals?

> How do you teach honour, or justice, or courage? How do you help students to welcome the innovator, to learn to be innovators themselves, and at the same time cherish the "eternal verities"? How do you arm people against propaganda and against crushing pressures to conform? How long does it take to assist a man to become healthily critical of society, of ideas, and of himself, without becoming a sceptic, one who has faith in nothing? Or how, in a curriculum, do you find time to get a hearing for ideas that are merely important against the clamour of those that are urgent?
>
> (Kidd 1966 p. 6)

4 MEANS AND METHODS IN ADULT EDUCATION

There seems to be a certain correlation between the overriding aims of education and the institutional forms adopted. On the whole the following seems to apply:

Forms	Aims
Lectures	Information dissemination *per se;* arousing interest
Study circles - seminars	Social learning; intellectual search in groups
Residential adult education (Scandinavian 'folk high schools', university-extension summer schools etc.)	Intellectual (and moral) education, sometimes related to occupational needs; social learning
Local authority and similar classes	Mainly intellectual education, often aimed at utilitarian study
Personnel training	Mainly utilitarian study
Distance education	Individual study in any field

The social aspect of adult study is often stressed as particularly important. Cooperation in groups toward common goals is a well-known feature of adult education (cf. Chamberlain 1961, for instance). The most typical exception is distance education, which, although it includes two-way communication, does so exclusively or mainly at a distance (in writing, on the telephone, by computer). The distant student primarily works alone. Whereas all learning is basically an individual activity, even though supported by cooperation in groups and by teaching, distance study is a form of education which is typically based on personal work by individual students more or less independently of the direct guidance of tutors.

This, of course, does not mean that distant students are deprived of tutoring, but in distance study a student can, as a rule, in some measure decide to what extent he or she is to make use of the teaching provided. This begins by the reading of printed material and the listening to recordings or radio programmes and even applies to watching video-recordings or live TV programmes. All this is a selective procedure: everyone selects what seems relevant to his or her picture of the learning matter and its problems and what can be connected with the cognitive structures already developed. To what extent a student really pays attention to written tutorial comments or makes use of facilities for face-to-face or telephone contacts when such are offered, also to varying extents depends on a personal choice.

The essential difference between distance learning and other types of adult learning is simply in the means of communication. According to Ripley Sims, who refers to distance education as non-contiguous as opposed to the contiguous learning situations in which students and tutors meet, communication is personal and face-to-face

in 'the contiguous learning environments';

> in the non-contiguous environments, communication may be personal and face-to-face for limited periods of time, but is largely written, mechanical, electronic or some other means of communicating at a distance.
>
> (Sims 1977 pp. 16 - 17)

> Correspondence school programs necessarily emphasize self-instruction as a method of learning. The course materials are prepared to make what is to be learned as clear as possible; to arrange and present the subject progressively in small, relatively easy-to-master steps; to eliminate the repetition of error and to promote the required response; to aid growth in intellectual ability, skill and insight; and to keep the learner conscious of his progress at all times. The self-instruction technique of the correspondence method of study in no way invalidates these basic learning principles. Learning is fundamentally an individual process and each person enters the process with techniques and levels of achievement uniquely his own. The method of correspondence study provides simultaneously an educational device for individualization in three distinct senses - student ability, variety of course offerings, and flexibility for time and place of study.
>
> (Sims 1966 p. 77)

From a social point of view there are evidently two types of learning (and teaching) in adult education: learning in groups and individual learning. The former must be supplemented by the latter to bring about actual learning in the sense of acquiring intellectual knowledge and skills as discussed by Sims above. Whereas students mainly work on their own in distance education and - of course - in completely self-directed study, there are in other types of adult education several kinds of face-to-face contact between tutors and students as well as peer-group meetings. Lectures, study circles, classes, workshops, laboratory work, tutorials, games and social gatherings are the most common types.

It is important to stress that it is learning, not organised education, that is an individual process, which may or may not be supported by interaction with others, face-to-face or by non-contiguous means, but is always related to something outside the learner:

> Properly understood, education is the social organisation of human learning; this learning being itself a reflexive process involving the individual psyche in relationship with the surrounding natural and social world.
>
> (Holly 1977 p. 172;
> cf. Fletcher 1980 p. 68)

There would seem to be almost universal agreement that adult education is or should be characterised by student participation in all decisions and by cooperation between all parties concerned. This is probably the basis of the high appreciation of group activities in most types of adult education. Cf. Lindeman 1926:

> 'In short, my conception of adult education is this: a cooperative venture in nonauthoritatian, informal learning, the chief purpose of which is to discover the meaning of experience; a quest of the mind which digs down to the roots of the preconceptions which formulate our conduct; a technique of learning for adults which makes education coterminous with life and hence elevates living itself to the level of adventurous experiment'
>
> (Gessner 1956 p. 60)

Different methodological problems occur in the various forms of adult education. Nevertheless, it is probably true to say that the type of communication usually adhered to - or at least aimed at - is a kind of conversation conducive to problem solving, analysing the thinking behind standpoints and finding one's own way of tackling difficulties.

This is explicitly so in study circles with or without a teacher - as witnessed by Gunnar Hirdman, a leading protagonist of this kind of adult education who, in 1942, published a pamphlet called 'The art of conversing. Something about the methods of the study circle' - and seems well to agree with Lindeman's conception of adult education as 'a cooperative venture in non-authoritarian .....

learning' (as quoted above).

Establishing a conversational contact, whether real or emotional, i.e. a contact *felt* to be conversational, is no doubt a means really to reach participants that is fairly universally practised - more or less successfully - by lecturers, tutors, seminar leaders and authors. It can be described as a Socratic method relying on students' hidden insight and capacity to think independently once they have been engaged in a real or simulated conversation which stimulates them.

This method applies also to distance education. A theory I have developed implies that the character of model distance education resembles that of a guided conversation aiming at learning and that the presence of the typical traits of such a conversation facilitates learning including the development of independent problem-solving skills. This view of the style of guided didactic conversation in distance education is based on the postulates:

1. that feelings of personal relation between the teaching and learning parties promote study pleasure and student motivation;
2. that such feelings can be fostered by well-developed self-instructional material and suitable two-way communication at a distance;
3. that intellectual pleasure and study motivation are favourable to the attainment of study goals and the use of proper study processes and methods;
4. that the atmosphere, language and conventions of friendly conversation favour feelings of personal relation according to postulate 1;
5. that messages given and received in conversational forms are comparatively easily understood and remembered;
6. that the conversation concept can be successfully translated for use by the media available to distance education;
7. that planning and guiding the work, whether carried out by the teaching organisation or the student, are necessary for organised study, which is characterised by explicit or implicit goal conceptions.

The distance-study course and the non-contiguous communication typical of distance education can be seen as the instruments of a conversation-like interaction between the student on the one hand and the tutor and counsellor of the supporting organisation administering the study on the other. There is then a constant conversation between authors and students, simulated through the students' interaction with the pre-produced courses and real through the written and/or telephone interaction with their tutors.

The characteristics of guided didactic conversation may be said to be:

- Easily accessible presentations of study matter; clear, somewhat colloquial language, in writing easily readable if the text is printed; moderate density of information.
- Explicit advice and suggestions to the student as to what to do and what to avoid, what to pay particular attention to and consider, with reasons provided.
- Invitations to an exchange of views, to questions, to judgements of what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected.
- Attempts to involve the student emotionally so that he or she takes a personal interest in the subject and its problems.
- Personal style including the use of the personal and possessive pronouns (*I, we, you, my (mine), our/s/, your/s/*).
- Demarcation of changes of themes through explicit statements, typographical means or, in recorded, spoken communication, through a change of speakers, e.g. male followed by female, or through pauses. (This is a characteristic of the guidance rather than of the conversation.)

I assume that if a course consistently represents a communication process felt to have the character of a conversation in which students' thinking and ideas are continuously utilised as means to find solutions, then the students will be more motivated and more successful than if the course studied has an impersonal textbook character.

My main formal hypotheses, based on the general postulates and the assumptions about what constitutes guided didactic conversation, can therefore be summarised as follows:

- The stronger the characteristics of guided didactic conversation, the stronger the students' feelings of personal relationship between them and the supporting organisation.
- The more those responsible in the supporting distance-study organisation are interested in making the study matter personally relevant to the students, the greater the personal involvement of the latter.
- The stronger the students' feelings of personal relations to the supporting organisation and of being personally involved with the study matter, the stronger the motivation and the more effective the learning.

Empirical studies testing this cluster of hypotheses as one unified theory have been undertaken. Nothing has come to light that would seem to falsify the hypotheses; on the contrary the studies have given probabilistic support to the theory (Holmberg & Schuemer 1980; Holmberg, Schuemer & Obermeier 1982).

It is my contention that conversation-like approaches are on the one hand based on reliance on students' capacity to think and work independently and on the other hand favour

the development of independence and autonomy. This view of conversation-like communication seems to permeate much of the ethos of adult education in general. It is an approach embedded in the basic principles of adult education as they are understood in the Western world. Technical methods of the most varying kinds can be made compatible with the conversational approach - even computer-assisted learning (cf. Bååth & Månsson 1977, Vincent 1982) - and could be regarded as tactical means supporting the strategy of conversation-like communication. On special aspects of conversation theory see e.g. Pask 1976, Entwistle 1978 and Thomas & Harri-Augstein 1977. The last mentioned authors refer to a learning conversation as comprising

> three parallel dialogues. Together these reflect the learner's cognitive processes back to him, support him through painful periods of change and encourage him to develop stable referents which anchor his judgement of the quality of his assessment. The three dialogues can be described as:
>
> (a) commentary on the learning process;
> (b) personal support of the learner's reflection; and
> (c) referents for evaluating learning competence.
>
> (Thomas & Harri-Augstein 1977 p. 101)

> Each of these three dialogues can become internalised, but people differ in the ease with which they can sustain each of them. Effective internalisation of the complete learning conversation produces the self-organised learner and the fully functioning man or woman. Such people learn from experience and continue to learn through life. Frozen internal conversations disable us as learners, and it is only when the external conversation is re-established that the frozen process can be revived. Living then becomes an ongoing opportunity for learning.
>
> (Thomas & Harri-Augstein 1977 p. 102)

The didactic conversation postulates some kind of equality between teacher and learner. The authors quoted underline that 'this area of equality expands' as the learner develops. 'As he becomes more self-organised, some of the conversation disappears into the learner's

head. He becomes his own tutor' (Thomas & Harri-Augstein 1977 p. 101). This recalls the quotation from Lindeman above and what Moore refers to as 'the maturing of every personality; .. the development of autonomous learners' *(Moore as quoted by Pratt 1975 p. 177).*

Knowles offers an attempt, relevant in this context, to spell out 'superior conditions of learning and principles of teaching' in adult education and, among other conditions and principles, states:

> The learning process is related to and makes use of the experience of the learners.
>
> ...
>
> The learners accept a share of the responsibility for planning and operating a learning experience, and therefore have a feeling of commitment toward it.
>
> ...
>
> The teacher accepts each student as a person of worth and respects his feelings and ideas.
>
> ...
>
> The teacher exposes his own feelings and contributes his resources as a colearner in the spirit of mutual inquiry.
>
> (Knowles 1970 pp. 52 - 53)

5 Conclusion

All this indicates a close relation between on the one hand the aims and methods of adult education, on the other hand the view of man as independent in his search for solutions of problems. Adult education is assumed to attract mature people intent on personal, intellectual and professional development in the direction of autonomy. The study content, the institutional forms and the methods usually applied are, as a rule, intended to pave the way for this development and, in fact, seem to do so by providing what Knowles calls an educative environment. He describes the characteristics of an educative environment as 1.) respect for personality; 2.) participation in decision making;

3.) freedom of expression and availability of information; and 4.) mutuality of responsibility in defining goals, planning and conducting activities, and evaluating ' (Knowles 1970 p. 60).

The great number of learning projects planned not by a teaching organisation but by adult students themselves (Tough 1978) illustrate the tendency towards student autonomy.

This implies some tentative support of the assumptions made explicit in the four hypotheses about adult education under 2 above. Unless the concepts of educational independence and autonomy can be operationalised in a way to make measurement possible (cf. the attempts to measure independent-learning skills of medical students described by Feletti 1982), the possibility to find more tangible support appears meagre. What occurs in particular situations, for instance in solving a specific problem or in the study of a special theme under certain given circumstances is open to analyses, from which deductions may be made. Cf. Marton 1977. If and under what conditions such conclusions can be generalised is a thorny problem, however.

If there are arguments in favour of the four hypotheses, we may nevertheless have reason to question the general validity of a particular relationship between adult education in all its facets and student autonomy. With the definition of adult education adopted above, the learning of mere facts (listing by heart the bones of the wrist or other objects or occurrences) as well as non-creative skills (typing, for instance) are included. It is certainly questionable if this type of learning has a close relationship to the development of independent thinking and autonomous decision-making. However, in less extreme cases our thinking in this respect may be

unnecessarily influenced by a 'tendency to separate the liberal from the vocational, rather than to undertake vocational education in a liberal context' (Wedell 1965 p. 121). The discussion of liberal vs. vocational education illustrates the role traditional educational values play in considerations of adult education (cf. Wedemeyer 1981 pp. 189 - 198).

It seems to be proper to conclude that in its ethos and intentions adult education is more or less universally attached to ideals of independence and autonomy as important characteristics, that this spirit permeates much adult education work, but that there are evident exceptions. The maturity of participants in adult education would seem to strengthen the assumptions that adult students are - or can be - particularly capable of independent study. This maturity, the conversational methods developed and the very ethos of adult education make it reasonable to expect of adult study particular potentials for developing independent personalities. This and knowledge of the general study motivation of voluntary, mature learners undoubtedly makes life-long learning a realistic proposition for considerable numbers of people to whom study opportunities are continuously available. There is well-grounded hope that this learning will be relevant to liberal education and independent thinking. This is probably as far as the four hypotheses stated under 2 above can be considered realistic and logically corroborated.

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